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UNCLAS HARARE 001958

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ZI](#)

SUBJECT: MUZENDA EULOGY INCLUDES APPEAL TO MDC

REF: (A) HARARE 1931 (B) HARARE 1600

[1](#)1. (U) SUMMARY: Robert Mugabe's eulogy on September 24 to Vice President Simon Muzenda, who died on September 20 (ref A), is not likely to change the political climate here. As with previous speeches, Mugabe seized the opportunity to extol the virtues of land reform, to vilify the British and Americans, and to dangle the carrot of reconciliation with the MDC. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (U) President Mugabe's speech commemorating the life of Simon Muzenda combined English, Shona, and Ndebele in prepared and impromptu comments. In English, Mugabe praised the life and contributions of the late Vice President, promoted the success of land reform program and vilified the British and the Americans. He accused white commercial farmers of attempting to get the EU to impose sanctions on Zimbabwean beef exports and urged such "Rhodesians" to leave the country. Reiterating the irreversibility of land reform, Mugabe maintained that the peasants in Zimbabwe were land reform's true beneficiaries chastised the British and Americans for being obstacles in Zimbabwe's independence during the 1970s.

[1](#)3. (U) In Shona and Ndebele, Mugabe drew on cultural themes and social norms, especially hierarchy and the status of elders. He welcomed MDC figures present and encouraged the need for dialogue between the two parties without interference by Western interests. He alluded to the need for the MDC to show respect to ZANU-PF by relating the story of a younger brother who disagreed with an older brother but, because of the elder's status, had to disagree in private even when he knew elder was wrong. He used another idiom that preached against airing dirty laundry, and he encouraged exclusion of the British from any interparty dialogue. Mugabe said Zimbabweans should work together regardless of political affiliation and told the crowd that he and Tsvangirai were the same -- they ate the same traditional

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foods (sadza and tripe and intestines) and hence were both Zimbabwean.

[1](#)4. (U) In conclusion, Mugabe talked about bequeathing a legacy to upcoming generations and the need to not forget the past. He was not explicit as to who would be taking over but mentioned several times the need to continue the journey laid out by the Zimbabwe founders.

[1](#)5. (SBU) COMMENT: Mugabe's speech as delivered differed considerably from his circulated written text, which made no mention of the MDC or bequeathing legacies. Underscoring the eulogy's intended connection to the domestic political context, the September 25 government daily featured "President's Calls for Unity With Opposition" on its front page. In fact, the message did not break significantly new ground and echoed the message of his Heroes Day speech last month (ref B): the ruling party is prepared to engage with the opposition but only on its own terms and with proper deference. The unusually heavy reliance on local dialect, especially in the "outreach" to the MDC, represented an effort to establish common ground with MDC elements in a way that would separate them from the party's white constituents and international supporters. Several MDC leaders were in the crowd but reported MDC reaction to Mugabe's appeal so far has been entirely negative, labeling Mugabe's remarks as meaningless window-dressing.

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